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SUBJECT: Belgrade Reaction to Status Decision
Postponement

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) UN Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari's announcement on November 10 that he would postpone presenting his proposal for the status of Kosovo until after Serbian elections was met with mixed reactions in Belgrade. While President Tadic expressed some gratitude for the delay, he also acknowledged that independence appears to be the probable outcome for Kosovo's status. Prime Minister Kostunica predictably attacked Ahtisaari and said that Ahtisaari has failed in his mandate, while other DSS members characterized the delay as a chance to reopen negotiations. The SRS, meanwhile, accused Tadic and Kostunica of making a deal with Ahtisaari to delay, and thus reduce the impact of the potential loss of Kosovo on their parties during the election. End Summary.

Ahtisaari Moves to Postpone Until After Elections

2. (SBU) UN Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari announced after a meeting of the Contact Group that he would delay a decision on Kosovo until after Serbian parliamentary elections, scheduled for January 21. Ahtisaari had warned the Serbian leadership earlier in the week that it needed to make a decision on elections before the Contact Group meeting on November 10. Ahtisaari also announced that he would present his proposal "without delay" after the parliamentary elections in January, potentially delivering immediately a significant issue to the newly elected parliament.

Tadic Reacts Positively to Delay

3. (SBU) President Tadic on Friday expressed gratitude for delay, emphasizing that postponement was useful for the democrats. Tadic reiterated his position that artificially set deadlines for a decision on future status was neither contributing to the solution nor stabilizing the situation in Serbia. Tadic also suggested that Ahtisaari chose delay because there is no unity within the Contact Group on the direction of the future status of Kosovo. In a

more moderated statement to local press, Tadic said that, though he would continue to fight against Kosovo independence, the probable status for Kosovo is closer to independence than any other solution. Early election campaign planning by the DS suggests that the democrats are focusing on their message on integration with the West and improving the daily lives of citizens in Serbia, instead of trying to use Kosovo to garner more votes.

DSS Looks to Undermine Ahtisaari Again

14. (SBU) Continuing with their usual attacks, the PM's DSS mobilized after the announcement in an effort to undermine Ahtissari's credibility in the negotiations. Prime Minister Kostunica said publicly on November 11 that the postponement was actually an admission by Ahtisaari of his failure to secure a sustainable resolution for Kosovo. Kostunica also questioned the timing of the decision, and accused Ahtisaari of stepping outside of his mandate by concerning himself with Serbian elections. Kostunica reiterated that Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia and that any move towards independence would violate the territorial integrity of Serbia and endanger the stability of the region. DSS vice-president Aleksandar Popovic raised the stakes by reiterating Kostunica's statements and suggesting that delay was due to "the big 'No' of Russia." Popovic also assessed that recognition of Kosovo by NATO members would confirm that the NATO bombing of Serbia was meant to separate Kosovo from Serbia -- which would thereby force Serbia

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to break diplomatic ties with those countries that recognized an independent Kosovo.

15. (SBU) Other DSS members, including Kostunica's advisor and negotiating team member Samardzic and Coordination Center for Kosovo Chief Raskovic-Ivic, took another view, seeing postponement as an opportunity to continue the negotiations. Samardzic said that postponement demonstrated that artificial deadlines should not be imposed on the process, and he called for the negotiations to continue between Belgrade and Pristina. Raskovic-Ivic said that Ahtisaari's decision to postpone showed that the Serbian position in the negotiations had improved.

Radicals Say Democrats Plotting with Ahtisaari

16. (SBU) SRS General Secretary Vucic accused Tadic and Kostunica of collaborating with Ahtisaari to organize a postponement of a decision on Kosovo. Vucic said that Tadic and Kostunica, because they expect that a decision on Kosovo will be negative for Serbia, were working with Ahtisaari to get him to delay his decision until after the parliamentary elections in January. The Radicals are probably banking on their position in the elections improving if Kosovo becomes independent before the elections, and see Ahtisaari's announcement as a small victory for the democratic bloc.

Comment

17. (SBU) Judging by the early reactions, Kosovo

will continue to be exploited as a central campaign issue. Aside from the obvious SRS and Socialist attacks, the DSS will continue to cite the constitution, and the preamble, as evidence that they have, and will continue to protect the territorial integrity of Serbia and keep Kosovo within Serbian borders. The DS appears more realistic in what the final status of Kosovo will be, and will probably avoid Kosovo as the main part of their message. Nonetheless, the DSS and others may be relishing the idea that Tadic, as the only senior elected official continuing in office before and after parliamentary elections, could be a convenient scapegoat for the loss of Kosovo.

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